

# Mexico Taps Ogilvy PR For Global Tourism Revival

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Arun Sudhaman 16 Sep 2011

MEXICO CITY--Mexico has consolidated its global tourism PR brief with Ogilvy PR, as it readies expanded budgets to lure visitors back to the country.

The decision comes after a comprehensive review process, [revealed earlier this year](#) by the Holmes Report. It is understood that a number of global networks pitched for the business, which has been handled on an interim basis by Ogilvy PR in North America since late 2010. The Holmes Report understands that Burson-Marsteller previously held the mandate for 18 months.

The remainder of the global assignment, split between various local agencies, is now expected to be consolidated with the WPP agency.

Mexico Tourism Board CMO Gerardo Llanes has announced plans to double PR spending to \$21 million, according to a [report in AdAge](#), in a bid to shift the perception that country is riddled with drug-fuelled violence.

According to Mexico's central bank, foreign tourism fell 6.3 percent in 2010, excluding border-area visitors. The first half of 2011 also saw a two percent decline when compared to the same period in 2010.

Accordingly, Mexico is looking to aggressively ramp up tourism marketing, given the critical nature of the sector to the country's economy. Last month, [it was reported](#) that president Felipe Calderon would appear in a new US TV push, promoting the country's various attractions.

A spokesman at Visit Mexico in London confirmed that Ogilvy PR had been appointed to the business.

# Mexico Aims For Tourism Revival With \$20m PR Review

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Mexico...new brand campaign

Arun Sudhaman 18 Jul 2011

MEXICO CITY--Mexico is reviewing its tourism PR business, as it readies expanded budgets to lure back tourists deterred by negative perceptions of the country.

The Mexico Tourism Board has conducted a formal review of its PR account, which has been handled on an interim basis by Ogilvy PR since late last year. The Holmes Report understands that Burson-Marsteller previously held the mandate for 18 months.

The review comes as Mexico Tourism Board CMO Gerardo Llanes announced plans to double PR spending to \$21 million, according to a [report in AdAge](#).

Llanes has been working with Ogilvy PR to try and shift the perception that the country is riddled with drug-fuelled violence. The country's swine flu outbreak in 2009 has also played a role in affecting tourism numbers, a critical component of Mexico's economy.

A spokesman at Visit Mexico in London confirmed the review was underway, and that a decision is imminent. It is understood that several agencies have pitched for the business.

# AdvertisingAge

## MEXICO LEANS ON PR TO LURE BACK TOURISTS Newly Minted CMO Gerardo Llanes Combats Negative Press, Consumer Perceptions

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Mexico's new branding campaign promotes atypical attractions, like underground rivers, swimming with whale sharks and camping.

Mexico is undoubtedly a challenged brand. Drug cartels, violence, murder and kidnappings have been grabbing headlines, thus deterring tourists who typically flock to the country for its beaches, Mayan archaeological sites and tequila.

To turn things around, the Mexico Tourism Board is launching an offensive on two fronts: one, a positive branding campaign carrying the tagline, "The Place You Thought You Knew," and the other, a heightened PR effort to dismantle drug- and violence-related U.S. press. While the first effort won't touch the second with a 10-foot pole, both represent a shift in marketing investment to favor PR and digital, as well as an attempt to make people feel better about traveling to Mexico.

At the helm of the radical shift in marketing dollars is CMO Gerardo Llanes, who took on the role just four months ago. He plans to reallocate up to one-quarter of the Mexico Tourism Board's \$100 million global marketing budget, much of which has been spent on traditional media buys in the past, to public relations and digital efforts. His approach will see PR spending double to \$21 million, while traditional media spending will shrink from \$21 million in 2010 to an expected \$6 million next year.

"We believe word-of-mouth is getting to be a better tool for us right now, especially now that we're seeing some not-so-positive things in the media, especially in the U.S.," Mr. Llanes said.

Mr. Llanes has experience on both the agency and marketer sides of the business -- he worked on the launch of Diet Coke in Mexico -- but when the head marketing role at the Mexico Tourism Board opened up, he jumped at it. There's nothing quite as appealingly challenging as Mexico, he said. "Managing a country brand is big," Mr. Llanes said. "I knew what was being said and done outside of the country."

Much of the "not-so-positive" media has appeared in mainstream publications, with claims that drug cartel-related violence and murder, typically contained to U.S.-Mexico border areas, has seeped into tourism destinations. Working with Ogilvy PR, Mr. Llanes has developed a public-



Gerardo Llanes

"We're reaching out to leader media outlets like Bloomberg, Newsweek and CNN to help us tell our side of the story and get the facts straight," Mr. Llanes said. "We're not denying that there are some areas of the country that have problems, but we're saying if you hear about something bad in Chicago, it wouldn't stop you from going to Los Angeles."

Despite reports of murder in tourist regions like Acapulco, Mr. Llanes is pushing the message that the crime index of 14 murders per 100,000 inhabitants in the entire country isn't much different from that of a city like New York or Houston, which he says have indexes of 16 and 14, respectively.

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Still, thanks to press reports, not to mention an April travel warning from the U.S. Department of State, Mr. Llanes is battling a tourism perception problem despite the organization's reports of increases in visitor, hotel development and occupancy rates. (It is worth stating, however, that those increases are year-over-year and compared to post-H1N1 stats.) The Wall Street Journal recently reported that tour operators have experienced declines in business and a number of cruise lines have canceled service to Acapulco. That's where the Mexico Tourism Board's new branding campaign, "The Place You Thought You Knew," comes into play.

That campaign, Mr. Llanes' first branding project, which will likely cost more than \$1 million, aims to build awareness, via digital and social media platforms, of "the story people don't know about Mexico." The message pushes activities and attractions beyond Cancun and Senor Frog's, promoting underground rivers, swimming with whale sharks and camping, for example.

While the organization likely will build online promotional programs down the road, it's working on solidifying its presence online via Twitter, new YouTube channels, a handful of new Facebook pages and targeted blogger and community engagement.

"There are a lot of Americans living in Mexico and travelling to Mexico," Mr. Llanes said of the group's new emphasis on social media. "It's better that an American talks to an American than having the Mexican government talk to an American."

"I'm trying to look at how do we create strategy to be more applicable in markets, more aggressive and more active in areas where traditionally we haven't been, like digital and social media, mainly because of the moment we're going through: the bad press and the development of social media," Mr. Llanes added. "We old guys are still in the TV and radio world. It's not like that anymore."

The organization's agency roster includes Havas Media and Vantage Strategies for online media, ZenithOptimedia for traditional media, Publicis for creative, Ogilvy PR for PR and social media and Planet Hollywood for celebrity PR.

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